Stories Aligned by a Clear View of Life

SOME critics assert dislike of the practice of collecting short stories in a book, and some even profess belief that the performance violates a canon of art. These latter iconoclasts probably, like other iconoclasts, enjoy setting up canons just for the fun of bowling them over.

If they had their way, where would O. Henry be? Mrs. Gerould built a windmill of O. Henry leaves, and then tilted at it most joyously. But O. Henry keeps right on selling. And to give heed to this illustration is not to let commerce beg the question for art.

There is one sort of pleasure in *Kim* or *Captains Courageous*, and another in *The Day's Work* or *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Mrs. Wharton is not less the artist in a short story than in *The House of Mirth*—and if she puts ten short stories into a single binding, she is, by the simplest of calculations, ten times as much of an artist.

Seven Good Tales.

Let them babble of "genre" and the "laws" of art: a good book is a good book, and John Taintor Foote's *The Lucky Seven* is one. The seven stories are not sequential. They have different settings, they tell about people of different types. But John Taintor Foote is in every page, and so the book is one book.

Good material may be spoiled by bad technique. Extra good technique may go surprisingly far with poor materials. Mr. Foote's technique is so admirable that, according to a recollection in which we have perfect confidence, it has been held up as a model in books on the art of story writing. And the "idea" of each of these stories is lifelike and worth considering. The people act like people; possibly a little bit more like short story people than like real people, but they are not dummies.

A "Gripping" Author.

Some people might call Andrew Day, in the first story, *Bolters*, a "dummy," implying deficiency in some of the practical qualities. But Andrew was a lit-ry feller! He wrote great, strong, "gripping" novels; they were only moderately popular at first—naturally, because they told the truth. The consequences of downright truth telling are likely to be, whether pleasant or unpleasant, as luck will have it, always extreme in degree.

Andrew became a lion when a celebrated British writer, landing on these shores, announced that he had come to see the Grand Canyon and talk to Andrew Day. But lionhood came too late! In wooing the muse Andrew had neglected, shamefully, we think, though he looked forward to her share in the fruits of his assured ultimate triumph, his very charming little wife. It would have been a simple matter—for any man but a literary genius—to take Mrs. Day out for an evening's fun instead of letting her sit night after night with nothing to do but listen to the scratching of her husband's pen. Andrew did really mean to take her out, but the paragraphs of power began to press for utterance just at opera time.

Losing His Grip.

So along came Monty Fay, the vulgarly opulent "film promoter," and an unfortunate affinity developed between him and Mrs. Day. They ran away—the story falls into rhyme—and Andrew betook himself to the doubtful condolence that comes in bottles. We are led to suppose that his ruin was complete, because he had a hitherto restrained but potentially destructive alcoholic heredity.

Not until after the catastrophe did Andrew Day recognize the force of his friend's cryptic advice, away back at the opening of this long short story, to "feed a bolter." That was the friend's name for a bird dog of otherwise impeccable behavior that insisted on eating retrieved birds. The only way to check the bolter's bad habit is to keep him too well fed to—— Now is the point of the story clear?

Themes of the Stories.

In *Goldie May* we have the story of a girl's tragedy; a victim of the old, old "way of a man with a maid." *Red Fox Furs* shows us German propaganda at its sly and devilish work. *Augusta's Bridge*—divorce with a sharp satirical twist. *A Cake in the Fourteenth Round*—a German saloon keeper's daughter and a young Irish boxer, with a victory for true love over social and racial opposition. In *Old Pastures* a cab horse remembers his gallant youth on a blue grass racetrack.

An odd assortment of "characters," but the reader emerges, not with jangling impressions, but with the memory of a single clear theme brought out with skilful shadings and by smartly ordered means. If any one of the stories holds the memory longer than others it is *Opus 13, Number 6*. A great musician painfully hides his art, taking lessons from the girl with whom he has fallen in love. She hears him play in public and calls him to account. He has not English enough to tell the tale of his passion and pours out the story of his love in the notes of music.

Any writer who can use such simple materials as this with such effectiveness as Mr. Foote gives this story is a master indeed of the very special art of short story writing.

THE LUCKY SEVEN. By JOHN TAINTOR FOOTE. D. Appleton & Company. $1.40.

Mr. Morris's New Book

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS'S new book, *His Daughter*, would surely be among the best sellers in summer.

About two-thirds of the volume treats of the fickle passions of Fred Dayton; the last third shows his nature "refined by war." In brief, the story is this:

Dayton loves his wife, but also other women; indeed the only fixed star in his course is his small daughter Ellen. When she dies in Paris the world seems to stop. Just before the war Dayton hears of another daughter whose existence he has not suspected. The mother is a pretty Parisian girl.

A Change of Heart.

This child he finds after a long while, and though she is very like the adored Ellen, he gives her up as a penance for deserting her mother.

And now he begins to look back on his old life with loathing—the war has brought out his better nature—and he and his wife start again to find what happiness the world may hold for them.

It is just here that one feels inclined to quarrel with Mr. Morris. It would be absurd to accuse so old a hand of not knowing how to tell his story well, but he tells it lazily; he issues bulletins as to the states of mind of his various characters; he does not work up his story sufficiently for the reader to find out those mental states for himself. And as a result the characters remain characters to the end; they never undergo that charming metamorphosis into human beings.

But it's by no means a bad story. It always holds the attention, it is often interesting and sometimes amusing.

HIS DAUGHTER. By GOUVERNEUR MORRIS. Scribner. $1.35.

More "Atlantic" Essays.

SEVENTEEN essays taken from the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* have been gathered into a second volume of *Atlantic Classics*.

The topics are exceedingly varied. How pleasant and diverting a good essayist can be, even in this day, is disclosed by a bit of Robert Gay's *The Temple's Difficult Door*. Suggesting that the Greek statues were possibly happier after their arms and heads and legs had been lost, Mr. Gay continues:

To take the illustration from a lower plane, may it not be that we get a keener pleasure out of eating an imperfect apple? It is neither the best possible apple, which would have been perfect, nor the worst possible apple, which would have a kind of negative perfection; it has a worm at the core; but I wonder whether we do not enjoy it more because we have to keep from eating him. Besides, he arouses in our mind all sorts of questionings. Why is he there? What kind of worm is he? How did he get in? How would he have gotten out if we had not ousted him?

I am rather proud of this little apologue of the apple. For the perfect apple could have roused no queries which the defective apple does not. The same subtle influences went to make both: the same elements, the same forces, the same chemical processes. But the defective apple has in addition to all these—the worm.

ATLANTIC CLASSICS: SECOND SERIES. Atlantic Monthly Press. $1.25.